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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MOSCOW 005828

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TAGS: [MARR](#) [NATO](#) [PREL](#) [MASS](#) [AF](#) [RS](#)  
SUBJECT: CSTO TO FUNNEL RUSSIAN AID TO AFGHANISTAN

REF: A. MOSCOW 4929  
[1](#)B. MOSCOW 5098

Classified By: Ambassador William J. Burns. Reasons 1.4 (a), (b), and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Russia has made the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) a key vehicle in expanding assistance to Afghanistan by committing itself to providing several hundred million dollars in military aid entirely via the CSTO. Russia's main priorities vis--vis Afghanistan are preventing the Taliban from returning to power and stemming the flow of illicit drugs into Russia (ref A). Russia also hopes to open a new arms market. Experts agree that the GOR views the expanding role of the CSTO as a win-win situation since Russian assistance gives the CSTO a more acceptable international color, while at the same time strengthening Russian leadership in the organization. Russian question marks over the future direction of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) have reinforced the preference to work through the CSTO. End Summary.

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The Aid To Come  
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[1](#)2. (C) Head of the MFA Afghanistan Desk Yuriy Khokhlov told us Russia plans to provide "several hundred million dollars" in military aid to Afghanistan, much of it as surplus equipment (ref B). He claimed Russia will use the CSTO as the conduit to supply this aid in order to streamline the process. Previously, when Russia provided Afghanistan with equipment, the GOR had to negotiate agreements with states that bordered Afghanistan to allow for the transshipment of arms. This process was sometimes lengthy. To save valuable time, Khokhlov said, military aid will now be distributed within the framework of the CSTO, allowing Russia to secure the necessary agreement to ship military hardware to Afghanistan from the very beginning of the program. In this vein, MFA NATO desk head Grigoriy Sumkin suggested that links between the CSTO and NATO would strengthen both organizations' abilities to provide assistance to Afghanistan.

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Influence, Arms Sales, and Peace  
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[1](#)3. (C) Russia has also focused on the CSTO as a vehicle for providing aid to Afghanistan as part of a broader effort to play a more prominent role in South and Central Asia. Military and regional experts agree that Russia wants to restore long-standing (if deeply complicated) ties with Afghanistan, including the Afghan affinity for Russian weapons, to prevent the Taliban from returning to power, to

bring security to the region, and to develop a new (and possibly lucrative) market for Russian arms.

14. (C) Yevgeniy Bazhanov, Vice President of the Russian Diplomatic Academy for Academic and International Relations, told us that Russia views Afghanistan as part of its Central Asian "backyard," and so wants stability and peace there. This would in turn give Russia another route for its pipelines to carry oil and gas to countries such as India. "Economics is a driving factor in this," he said. The CSTO, he argued, could help Russia pursue these economic goals, while at the same time keeping China at arm's length.

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CSTO Goals and Activities In Afghanistan  
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15. (C) To disrupt the estimated 60 metric tons of heroin (600 MT opium equivalent) that are smuggled each year from Afghanistan into Russia through the Central Asian states, since 2003 the CSTO has conducted "Operation Channel." During two week-long interdiction blitzes each year, extra personnel are stationed at critical junctures on the Russian border and in Central Asia to search for drugs and precursor chemicals. Russia, Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan participate in the blitzes, and a number of countries send observers. Operation Channel 2007 ended December 3. Ten tons of narcotics were reportedly confiscated, although the GOR's statistics tend to overestimate seizures. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime has praised Operation Channel, and set up joint projects against drugs and narco-crime, and to expand information-sharing. In addition, Russia announced at the Dushanbe CIS Summit that it is willing to sell arms at

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domestic Russian prices to countries that support the interdiction blitzes. According to Duma Defense Committee member Andrey Golovatyuk, this will help ensure interoperability of equipment.

16. (C) According to Gennadiy Chufrin, Deputy Director of the Institute of World Economy and International Relations (IMEMO), the narcotics issue is of serious concern to Russia, and the CSTO is a natural instrument through which the GOR has undertaken counter-narcotics measures along Afghanistan's borders. He claimed Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan are eager to cooperate with Russia through the CSTO while the GOR is attempting to enlist Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan in joint counter-narcotics efforts. Chufrin believes that the GOR finds the SCO ill-suited to deal with Afghanistan at this point because the organization's operational focus has not been well-defined.

17. (C) The CSTO's activities also include the establishment of an Afghanistan working group, which visited Kabul from March 9-13, to seek ways to aid Afghanistan, including providing training to the Afghan Army. Aleksandr Pikayev of the Institute of World Economy and International Relations told us the CSTO could be well-placed to train and equip the Afghan Army.

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